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# City Play: Post-Affordances and the Transformative Power of Place

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# City Play: Post-Affordances and the Transformative Power of Place

## **Abstract**

Landscape architecture research and practice often focus on demand or instrumental value of the land to serve some need, like a healing garden or playground, or the intrinsic value of the land due to unique characteristics, like a protected wilderness or geological phenomenon, but rarely does the discipline concentrate on the transformative power of the environment. Sarkar (2012) suggests that transformative power refers to those unanticipated experiences with the environment that change or transform our worldview.

## **Keywords**

urban design, affordances, appropriation, urban ecological theory, nested systems

## **Disciplines**

Architectural Engineering | Architectural History and Criticism | Architectural Technology | Environmental Design | Landscape Architecture | Urban, Community and Regional Planning

## **Comments**

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## City Play: Post-Affordances and the Transformative Power of Place

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**Keywords:** urban design, affordances, appropriation, urban ecological theory, nested systems

Landscape architecture research and practice often focus on demand or instrumental value of the land to serve some need, like a healing garden or playground, or the intrinsic value of the land due to unique characteristics, like a protected wilderness or geological phenomenon, but rarely does the discipline concentrate on the transformative power of the environment. Sarkar (2012) suggests that transformative power refers to those unanticipated experiences with the environment that change or transform our worldview. Both natural and cultural entities may contain a transformative power that, for good or bad, go beyond either preference (demand/instrumental value) for an experience or a well-known, intrinsic value. In other words, the aura of the place is always subject to the changing values placed on it (i.e., Confederate monuments), for good or ill (Benjamin and Arendt 1986). The transformative power of the environment is similar to the Gibsons' (1979, 127) well-known concept of affordance: "the affordances of the environment are what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill." However, affordances measure visible instrumental or intrinsic values. The presentation suggests that the transformative power of the environment captured and shared through social media provides a socioecological post-affordance (Brofenbrenner 2000). Social media makes the real "real" through reflexive properties unconsidered in functionalist ecological models. Using big data on human play in cities from across the globe, I will discuss how social media challenges the instrumental or intrinsic value of place. Through a combination of place-focused study and the analysis of big data across multiple sites, I will discuss how post-affordances—place affordances that are neither here nor there—express the transformative power of public space. Landscape architecture strives to create places that enable everyone, regardless of age, gender, race, ethnicity, ability, and combination thereof, to successfully participate in public space. Here, I build on affordances and urban ecological theory (Nassauer 2012) to suggest that social media is a socioecological process nested within place, and that landscape architects can enable others to benefit from the transformative power of place through the analysis of post-affordances.